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SUBJECT: 2009 YUCATAN OSAC CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT

REF: 08 STATE 168473

1. (U) Overall Crime and Safety Situation:

Crime Threats

The Yucatan Peninsula has not suffered the same level of escalating violence seen in other parts of Mexico. However in 2008 there were some high profile criminal acts that served as a reminder that the Yucatan is part of the nationwide narco-conflict underway in Mexico. There is no evidence that indicates that criminals specifically target American citizens. Criminals select victims based on appearance, vulnerability, and inattentiveness.

There have been a number of rapes reported in Cancun and other resort areas. Many of these have occurred at night or in the early morning. Attacks have also occurred on deserted beaches and in hotel rooms. Acquaintance rape is a serious problem. In other cases, hotel workers, taxi drivers, and security personnel have been implicated.

See the information at travel.state.gov regarding Spring Break in Mexico if you are considering visiting Mexican resort areas during February through March when thousands of US college students traditionally arrive in those areas. Additional information designed specifically for traveling students is available at studentsabroad.state.gov.

Kidnapping, including the kidnapping of non-Mexicans, continues at alarming rates. So-called express kidnappings, an attempt to get quick cash in exchange for the release of an individual, have occurred in almost all the large cities in Mexico and appear to target not only the wealthy, but also the middle class. U.S. businesses with offices in Mexico or concerned U.S. citizens may contact the U.S. Embassy or any U.S. consulate to discuss precautions they should take.

Kidnapping in Mexico has become a lucrative business, whether it be an actual kidnapping or a virtual kidnapping. A common scam throughout Mexico is telephone kidnapping with a similar methodology. The virtual kidnapping calls typically include a distraught voice immediately after the phone is answered that serves as a ploy to elicit information about a potential victim. The caller then uses this knowledge to demand ransom for the release of the supposed victim. In the event of such a call stay calm since the vast majority of the calls are hoaxes; do not reveal any personal information; try to speak with the victim to corroborate identity; and contact the local police as well as the Embassy or nearest Consulate.

1B. Safety

Standards of security, safety, and supervision may not reach those expected in the United States. This has contributed to deaths of U.S. citizens in automobile accidents, after falls from balconies or into open ditches, by drowning in the ocean as well as in hotel pools, and in water-sports mishaps, among others.

Over 3 million U.S. citizens travel to Cancun and other Mexican beach resorts each year, including as many as 120,000 during "spring break" season, which normally begins in mid-February and runs about two months. Excessive alcohol consumption, especially by U.S. citizens under the legal U.S. drinking age, is a significant problem. The legal drinking age in Mexico is 18, but it is not uniformly enforced. Alcohol is implicated in the majority of arrests, violent crimes, accidents and deaths suffered by U.S. citizen tourists.

In recent years, moped rentals have become very widespread in Cancun and Cozumel, and the number of serious moped accidents has risen accordingly. Most operators carry no insurance and do not conduct safety checks. The U.S. Embassy recommends avoiding operators who do not provide a helmet with the rental. Some operators have been known to demand fees many times in excess of damages caused to the vehicles, even if renters have purchased insurance in advance. Vacationers at other beach resorts have encountered similar problems after accidents involving rented jet-skis. There have been cases of mobs gathering to prevent tourists from departing the scene and to intimidate them into paying exorbitant damage claims.

Visitors should be aware of their surroundings at all times, even when in areas generally considered safe. Women traveling alone are especially vulnerable and should exercise caution, particularly at night. Victims, who are almost always unaccompanied, have been raped, robbed of personal property, or abducted and then held while their credit cards were used at various businesses and Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs). U.S. citizens should be very cautious in general when using ATMs in Mexico. If an ATM must be used, it should be accessed only during the business day at large protected facilities (preferably inside commercial establishments, rather than at glass-enclosed, highly visible ATMs on streets). U.S. and

Mexican citizens are sometimes accosted on the street and forced to withdraw money from their accounts using their ATM cards.

Armed street crime is a serious problem in all of the major cities. Some bars and nightclubs, especially in resort cities

such as Cancun, can be havens for drug dealers and petty criminals. Some establishments may contaminate or drug drinks to gain control over the patron.

One of the better recommendations for avoiding being the victim of a crime at tourist destinations is employing the "buddy system", traveling with a trusted individual. Be cognizant of your consumption of alcohol. Most vehicular accidents and incidents of crime affecting U.S. citizens involve the excess consumption alcohol.

12. (U) Political Violence

Civil Unrest

No major incidents of civil unrest have been reported within the last 12 months.

1B. Demonstrations

Americans and American interests have not been the target of major demonstrations. Within the last 12 months only one protest has occurred at the U.S. Consulate in Merida.

The Mexican Constitution prohibits political activities by foreigners, and such actions may result in detention and/or deportation. Travelers should avoid political demonstrations and other activities that might be deemed political by the Mexican authorities. Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and escalate into violence. U.S. citizens are urged to avoid the areas of demonstrations, and to exercise caution if in the vicinity of any protests.

1C. International Terrorism

There is no evidence to support that Islamic Radical Groups are operating in the Yucatan Peninsula. The Yucatan is widely reported to be a trafficking route for Caribbean immigrants, and these same trafficking routes could be exploited by international terrorist groups.

13. (U) Post Specific Concerns

Hurricanes

From June to November, the Peninsula may experience strong winds and rains as a result of hurricanes in the Gulf or along the Pacific Coast. The state of Quintana Roo tends to suffer the greatest effects from Atlantic hurricanes, however storms have been known to cause flooding and disruption of utility services throughout the Yucatan.

Travelers are advised to keep abreast of developing weather conditions during the hurricane season and to avoid the paths of storms when possible. It is prudent to leave a detailed itinerary, including local contact information and expected time-date of return with a friend or family member.

1B. Drugs and Narcoterrorism

Mexico is well known for its illegal drug trade and the corruption the industry fosters. The Yucatan peninsula is strategically close to narcotic smuggling routes of Central America and parts of the Caribbean. Most of the violent crimes reported over the last 12 months is the result of various narco-trafficking groups fighting for control of these smuggling routes.

14. (U) Police Responses

Police corruption and involvement in criminal activity occurs in the Yucatan as it does in most parts of Mexico. Low apprehension and conviction rates of criminals contribute to Mexico's high crime rate. Corruption, along with fear of reprisals from criminal elements, leads most to believe that many crimes go unreported.

U.S. citizens are advised to cooperate with police if stopped and questioned. If involved in a traffic accident or victimized by crime, one may be asked to accompany the investigating officer to a local police station to file a report. A complaint must be filed in the area where the crime occurred. Attempting to file a complaint once one has returned to the U.S. can be a difficult and time consuming process. U.S. citizen victims of crime in Mexico are encouraged to report the incident to the nearest police headquarters and to the nearest U.S. consular office.

The Mexican police emergency number is 066. Reported times for the arrival of emergency services varies.

15. (U) Medical Emergencies:

Health Concerns

Persons visiting the Yucatan should take normal tourist precautions with regard to drinking water, eating fresh fruits, vegetables and salads.

Health insurance is an important consideration while traveling in the Yucatan. Travelers are responsible for ensuring that they have adequate health insurance while traveling throughout Mexico.

1B. Other Health Information

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad is provided in the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs brochure, "Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad" available via the Consular Affairs web page at [HYPERLINK "http://www.travel.state.gov/"](http://www.travel.state.gov/) [http://www.trav el.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov/)

Additional health information can be found at the CDC international Traveler's hotline - 888-232-6384 or 800 232-4636 or [HYPERLINK "http://www.cdc.gov/"](http://www.cdc.gov/) http://www.cdc.gov

International health insurance that provides coverage to the Yucatan can be easily obtained from private companies. Private air ambulance services are also available for injuries or

illnesses best treated in the U.S.

The RSO Office Merida does not endorse any specific private insurance or air ambulance company. The following list is for information purposes only:

For international treatment and medical insurance:
AEA International (206) 340-6000

Air ambulances the service the Yucatan:
Air Compassion 1-866-270-9198 or 001- 883-270-9198
Advanced Air Ambulance 800-633-3590 or 305-232-7700
AirMD Air Ambulance Services 800-282-6878 or 1-727-530-7972
Air Ambulance Professionals 800-752-4195 or 954-491-0555
Air Response 800-631-6565 or 303-858-9967
Critical Air Medical 800-247-8326 or 619-571-0482

An additional list of companies that provide international air ambulance services can be found at [HYPERLINK "http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1470.html"](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1470.html) \\1 "companies"http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1470.html#companies.

16. (U) Precautions While Traveling:

Traveling by Automobile

Road conditions in the Yucatan Peninsula are different than those encountered in the United States. Extra care should be exercised when passing a vehicle or being passed. Non-toll roads between major cities can be narrow and vary in conditions. Toll roads are generally wider and better maintained. Drivers should beware of unmarked speed bumps in populated areas. Driving at night outside of major cities is not advisable due to the lack of adequate street lighting.

Criminal assaults occur on highways throughout Mexico; travelers should exercise extreme caution at all times, avoid traveling at night, and may wish to use toll ("cuota") roads rather than the less secure "free" ("libre") roads whenever possible.

Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death of U.S. citizens in Mexico. Motorists should exercise special caution on the heavily-traveled expressway south of Cancun, particularly between Playa del Carmen and Tulum, where the road narrows from 4 divided lanes to two-way traffic on a narrow and poorly-maintained road.

U.S. citizens are advised to cooperate with official checkpoints when traveling on Mexican highways.

Prior to road travel ensure your vehicle is in good working condition and that fluids are at the correct level. When traveling long distances, it is best to travel in tandem with another vehicle. Ensure that there is enough fuel to reach larger cities or towns, as some smaller communities may not have service stations.

The following items are recommended for road trips:

- Cellular phone and charger
- Spare tire
- Portable gas can with funnel
- Potable water
- Non-perishable food items

- First aid kit
- Jumper cables
- Flares / reflectors
- Tool kit
- Spare key

1B. Protecting Your Vehicle

Do not leave valuables or items such as laptops, ipods and expensive sunglasses in plain view and unattended in your vehicle. Avoid leaving your auto on the street. When possible park your vehicle inside residential compounds or parking areas with attendants.

17. (U) Precautions at Your Residence

Be cautious of unannounced maintenance, utility, or municipal service personnel asking for entry into your residence. Ask for proper identification and verify the person's identity before allowing access.

When hiring domestic help, vet the person to the greatest extent you can. Ensure they are briefed on not volunteering information to unidentified callers and not allowing individuals into your home without proper authorization. Though you may have great trust in your house staff, it is best to maintain good control over keys that lead into your living area.

18. (U) Personal Security Practices

1A. Daily Habits

Vary your times and routes to and from work, school, or activities. Do not become time and place predictable.

Maintain a low personal profile; it is best to avoid activities that draw attention. Avoid wearing ostentatious jewelry or clothing that may bring unwanted attention.

Be alert to surveillance. Criminals, even petty thieves, are known to watch the activities of their victims before they commit a robbery or assault.

Advise colleagues and family of your daily plans and ensure they know how to reach you.

1B. General Security

Always be aware of your surroundings. Report all suspicious activity to the proper authorities.

In traffic, always attempt to leave space in which to maneuver. Always leave yourself an exit. Be prepared to take evasive action at any time.

Avoid choke points in travel. Be wary of diversions.

Whenever possible, do not have a set day for shopping, errands and personal needs. Be unpredictable.

Never give out your personal information such as family member and household staff names, addresses and telephone numbers in an open setting.

Ensure all of your family members are briefed on security measures.

1C. Security Companies

There are numerous private security companies available in the Yucatan Peninsula and through out Mexico. The RSO Office Merida does not endorse any specific private security company. The following list is for information purposes only:

ADT Security Services
Kroll
Control Risk
Wakenhut
Intercon Security Services
Protigi
Vance International Mexico

19. (U) Other Relevant Information

Mexico country code: 52
Merida city code: 99

U.S. Consulate Merida
Calle 60 No. 338-K x 29 y 31
Col. Alcala Martin Merida, Yucatan, Mexico 97050
(011) (52) (999) 942-5700 (dialing from the U.S.)
(01) (999) 942-5700 (dialing from within Mexico)
942-5700 (dialing from within Merida)
E-mail: meridacons@state.gov

Consular Agency Cancun
Plaza Caracol II, 3er Piso No. 320-323
Km 8.5 Blvd. Kukulcan,
Zona Hotelera Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77500
(011)(52)(1)(998) 845-4364 (dialing from the U.S.)
(044)(998) 845-4364 (dialing from within Cancun)
(045)(998) 845-4364 (dialing from elsewhere in Mexico)
E-mail: cancunagency@gmail.com
Consular Agency Cozumel
Villa Mar Mall in the Main Plaza, Locale # 8
Parque Juarez - Av. Juarez y 5th Av. Nte.
Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
(011)(52)(1)(987) 876-0624 (dialing from the U.S.)
(044)(987) 876-0624 (dialing from within Cozumel)
(045)(987) 876-0624 (dialing from elsewhere in Mexico)
E-mail: usgov@cozumel.net or usca@cozumel.net

Consular Agency Playa del Carmen
"The Palapa" Calle 1 Sur, Entre 15 Av. Y 20 Av.
Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77710
(011)(52)(1)(984) 807-8355 (dialing from the U.S.)
(044)(984) 807-8355 (dialing from within Playa)
(045)(984) 807-8355 (dialing from elsewhere in Mexico)
E-Mail: playausca@hotmail.com

Police Emergency: 066

110. (U) OSAC Mexico Country Council:

The Department of State supports an active OSAC Council, with a membership of 80 companies. For more information on OSAC and future OSAC events, contact Ms. Janet Salgado at 5080-2000, ext. 14918. For more information on OSAC in the Yucatan, contact the Regional Security Office Merida (011) (52) (999) 942-5719 or OSAC's Regional Coordinator for the Western Hemisphere or visit the council on line at [HYPERLINK "http://www.osac.gov/"](http://www.osac.gov/)<http://www.OSAC.gov>

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